

323 aforementioned social reasons. They can bake fired bricks, "shehla", but have no use or orders for them, and do not make them at present. They apply their artistic talents [346] to a tower-like crown, "gulelat", which they place on the top of the thatched roof of the Falasha synagogue, the "mesgid" (which has also the practical effect of preventing the penetration of water during the rain storms).

415 The vast majority of clay utensils produced by the craftswoman is used in the household. Many of them are small, not over 12 inches in diameter or height. Round forms predominate, especially spherical or semi-spherical bowls with a long or short neck. Nearly all have two handles on the side, for grasping and for pulling a rope through.

The simple baking plate for the daily enjara bread, the "megogo", in town called "metad", has already been [391] mentioned. Placed on the hearth of three stones, it forms a simple stove, and itself is topped by a somewhat conical ("maged") lid which fits snugly. 20" in diameter, 1-1/2" high, 1" thick, grain is also roasted on it.

There are numerous varieties of water pitchers, mostly pear-shaped, with long, stout necks. When full (about 15 liters), the Amhara women carry them on the back, and therefore a special loop is added by the craftswoman on the base of the neck, so that the rope can be drawn through it and around the chest, for added support. The most common, big water-pitcher of this kind is the "madi-ga", with a height of 20" of which 5" are spout, 14" at its greatest width, and a 5" width of the spout. It is

633 the old Portuguese-type castles, even then in ruins.

• [34] The new mosque, built through Italian encouragement during the occupation, overshadows both the big market and the old Muslim "ghetto" with the old mosque, at lower elevation.

563 The local Muslim "Qadi", ecclesiastical Muslim judge, 624 regarded as their provincial temporal chief, calls on the governor-general every Tuesday. Most Muslims have not moved far from their old section, partly because it is near the big market which is their economic as well as social gathering place, partly because they, almost as much as the ethnic artisans, wish to avoid insults, mockery, and quarrels with young members of the dominant majority.

759 In addition to being a center of public announce- 743 ments, and the table of the judge for petty crimes, the market now also serves as center for the activities of modern "dressers". These medical auxiliaries set up their tables under one of the shady trees, their bottles, hypodermic needles, cotton wool, etc., clearly visible, with chairs for several patients, set apart by an enclosure of barbed wire. When an epidemic threatens, and [73] during and after it (e.g. typhus or spotted fever), the public can obtain free injections there, or call a dresser to come to their home for a small fee.

633 Each town is divided into administrative wards, sometimes called "qäbälē", but almost invariably named after the church located in it. Thus a person will say "I am from Medhanē Alam" (church of the "Savior of the

A. The Structure of Church Organization.

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a) The Church buildings and design.

The traditional church building is round, designed on a pattern of three concentric circles. This combines the round pattern of the African hut, though much larger in this case, with the functional design of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Like the latter, each church has a Holy of Holies ("geddiesta geddusan"), a closed inner sanctum, which may be entered only by upper priesthood

[782]

or the day's officiating priest. He carries burning and smoking incense in a metal or clay canser, while he marches around the sacred wooden tablet, the "tabot", located there. On the tabot, which may not be seen by layman's eyes, are inscribed, in Ge'ez, the name of the saint to whom the particular (parish) church is dedicated, plus magical names of angels and geometric symbolism and phrases from both the Old and New Testament. The "tabot" represents symbolically the Ark of Moses kept by the ancient Israelites in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem.

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The second circumference, the "maqdas", can be seen from the outside through several doorless openings.

[788]

Here the priests perform the eucharist, hidden from the public gaze by portable white linen screens. The "maqdas" is restricted only during services.

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Within the third, walled-in circumference, the "taza", called also "ge'ene mahlēt" (lit. reciting-place of devotional poetry), the chorister-scribes ("dābtāra") congregate while they chant devotional poetry and other

796 liturgy, swaying and dancing to the rythm of their raised
346 voices, the beat of huge drums, and the tinkling of sistra.

● Laymen may also occupy sections within this third enclosure, mostly near the northern end. There is no seating. Standing is required during the long services [481] that begin just before dawn and last many hours. Therefore, priests and chanters lean on "maqomya", strong bamboo crutches equipped with iron or even silver concave tops. These are also used as they sway with the rythm when the dancing is in progress. These crutches may be privately owned; but many churches own simpler ones as church utensils. When important visitors, "great men" and their guests attend, without maqomyas of their own, the chief priest usually takes those owned or used by the lesser priests to supply the Very Important persons, to the barely disguised displeasure of the regular users.

346
562 Women are not admitted even into this third outer enclosure. They must remain outside the church building, in the yard, or leaning against the hard-mud wall, or, at a more pretentious church, under the outer colonnade of wooden posts which support the overhanging edge of the roof. The roof, usually thatched, but of imported corrugated iron in better urban churches, is usually ornamented with an iron cross adorned with wooden or metal ostrich eggs. (This custom may be of older, African, origin.)

793 Parish priests, (unlike mām̄h̄r scholars) are also
[66] not bashful about demanding their due (produce tithe,
sheep, honey, even cash) from their tenants of church
land. Sardonic peasant humor expresses this in the pro-
verb:

[539] "The bashful priest,
the blind donkey,
(are one)" . (i.e. both would be helpless and
starve to death).

532 Among artisans who do specialist work for the
346 church is the artist of church paintings, usually highly
colorful and realistic scenes from the suffering of the
saints, in morbid and gory detail; the beauties of hea-
ven and the trinity; the horrors of hell ruled by a chain-
ed, soul-munching Satan; etc. These religious and semi-
religious story illustrations and legends are painted on
canvas and then attached to the inside of church walls..

874 Church students are usually boys 10 years or
over (never girls), who at first learn the Geez-Amharid
alphabet, reading Geez without translating, beginning with
the Epistle of the Apostle John. They are taught by rote,
memorizing by chanting the portions out loud. There is
very little writing in the early grades, and experimen-
tation is traditionally discouraged, for fear that the
boys might use their new-won learning to write magic
amulets. Before examinations, church students stimulate

874
276 their mental processes by eating the leaf of a Datura
weed, resembling Jimson weed called "astānager" (lit. to
stimulate talk) which is also used by dābtāra in exor-

778 the frame, are now often cut from modern tin cans.

The ceremonial drinking cup used in the eucharist is the "tewa", usually made of metal. But if used in the "māhabber" communal sodality outside the church, it is often of horn or clay, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, 5 inches diameter at top, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches at bottom. On the latter occasion it is filled with barley beer or "berz" (honey-water). This is given the peasant at plowing time to confer blessing upon him, thus called "maras baggo" (for spring plowing).

Other equipment belonging to the church may be a wooden pulpit for reading (not preaching), some tin [373] oil-lamps or the old wick-like candles (called "twār").

778 Very important are the drums, huge affairs carried by
534 the younger dancers during worship, suspended from shoulder straps. The barrel-like "nāgarit", of which the average church has three (or must borrow them), usually has a height of at least 30 inches, a diameter of 15 inches. It is made of "wanza" wood (olive or other hardwood), with tanned oxhide moistened and stretched tightly across both ends. The drummer operates it with the flat of his fingers and top of flat palm. Another type is the "kabaro" drum, in which one end is bigger than the other. The drums and the swaying maqomya sticks keep time during the chanting. Trumpets are used only for parades, to herald the march, but not in accompaniment.

778 When not in use, most of these utensils are located in a little treasure house, called "bētalchem" (in
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251

778 Geez). Here the bread and wine used in the eucharist are
346 prepared and stored with great secrecy. The utensils of
251 the nearby cooking hut, the baking pan "metad" and large
clay jars for barley beer, are also stored here. Supplies
of tyeff, barley, wheat, beans, peas, may also be stored.

779 In recent years, church parades feature prominent-
186 ly the flag of the nation, the red-green-yellow of the
central government, emphasizing in modern ways the close
union of church and state that has long been traditional
in Abyssinia.

(e) Worship and Devotional Poetry.

533 The musical chants and notations studies formally
796 have already been outlined in connection with church edu-
cation.

Church hymns, including devotional poetry, are
called "gene" in a generic rather than specifically ac-
curate sense. A collection of them is contained in the
book "gubae gana", and they are sung in a special mode.

The chief mode is called "selt". It has three variations:

- (1) "geez" - short tones, dedicated to the "Father";
- (2) "ezel" - mournful tones in minor key, dedicated
to the "Son" 's passion;
- (3) "araray" - long, drawn-out tones, dedicated
to the "Holy Ghost".

These variations are interlaced, for special re-
sults, and for specific occasions. The mass, "beddede"
(lit. a purification), is chanted in a mode bearing the

[137] *Buddleia*, a large St. John's Wort and a handsome red Aloe, comes out in the course of the year. There is a very striking giant thistle (*Echinops*). During the rains lilies, orchids, and red-hot-pokers (*Kniphofia*) come up in plenty. Many typically temperate genera occur in the mountain grasslands, examples being a low-growing wild rose, ladies' mantle (*Alchemilla*) and mullein (*Verbascum*).

[138] The lower plateau, which is the more extensive part and the only type of country seen from the motor road, is comparatively flat and therefore has [497] naturally been traversed at all times by the main routes between north and south. The streams meander through broad, shallow valleys which, being [231] swampy and almost impassable in the rains, are uninhabited, but much used for grazing. The main streams, following the dip of the lava beds, flow [311] north-west. Well-marked tributaries are few, and after heavy rain the water simply drains away over the general surface. Here and there are small secondary plateaus, standing two to three hundred feet above the general level; their slopes where not too steep are well populated and their flat tops largely under cultivation. Good examples are the village areas of Fajji and Aloberet shown on the map. These small plateaus, as well as all the edges of gorges in the [135] north-west corner of the sheet, are capped with a very hard layer of basalt which (as I found to my great annoyance when making the compass survey) contains an abundance of magnetic iron. A hundred years ago, as several [325] travellers have recorded, these rocks were used for iron-smelting, but the industry has long since been abandoned.

As we follow the streams upwards into the higher part of the plateau the character of the country changes. The broad plains narrow down and disappear, and the streams, more recently entrenched, flow in narrow valleys and little ravines; some of them might be thought quite striking if it were not for the severe standard of comparison afforded by the huge gorges below. The country is broken up into hills, usually steep-sided and flat-topped, and rocky hogbacks. This kind of country is to be seen in the south-east corner of the sheet. The most interesting feature here is the wedge of country left standing up between the Beressa river and its large tributary the Miaka. It has been cut away sharply on either side and forms, in its narrower part, a high ridge between the valleys. One of the highest points was appropriated [122] long ago for a fort (near the village of Dilila) and was again used as such, by both parties at different times, during the Italian régime. The other high [346] point (a prominent hill farther to the south-east, near the edge of the sheet) has recently been crowned with a church dedicated to the archangel Gabriel.

The third and most interesting type of country is that of the gorges, which cut into the almost level plateau with such remarkable abruptness that they resemble scoopings in a lump of cheese made with a sharp-edged gouge. At the head of each gorge the streams form a series of falls, or in some cases a single big fall of 400 feet or so; even higher falls, up to 600 feet, can be seen elsewhere. Everywhere the upper walls of the gorges, which are basaltic, fall precipitously, and often form vertical cliffs several hundred feet high. So sharply defined are these gorge-edges that a heedless person walking on the plateau might, in some places, fall over them into the abyss. The walls do not however drop away continuously to the stream at the bottom; at a certain level, or in some valleys at more than one level, a horizontal shelf is

133 developed. I was interested to find, when first exploring this piece of country,
 [36] that the shelves were well populated, intensively cultivated, and provided
 with a quite surprising number of churches; facts, as pointed out below, of
 some historical significance.

After completing the framework of the map I made several calculations of depth in the Beressa gorge. An Abney level was used and as high angles were involved I think the results are trustworthy. They showed a depth of 1808 feet at the point marked *a*, just under 3 miles from the head of the gorge; 1985 feet at point *b*, 4 miles down; and 2170 feet at *c*, not quite 6 miles down. The average gradient from *a* to *b* was therefore about 2½ per cent., from *b* to *c* about 2 per cent. The depths were measured from three points (marked 1-3), all at practically the same level, on the edge of the gorge, the height of which can be taken as about 9300 feet. The absolute level of point *c* is therefore about 7130 feet, and this is almost the lowest point on the sheet. Measurements show that the depth of this gorge, enormously impressive though it is, is not more than one-fifth of its breadth. Although relatively deeper ones no doubt exist, I cannot help being highly sceptical of Rocher d'Hericourt's report of a ravine "14 leagues north-west of Angolala" which he alleged to be 1254 metres deep and only 800 broad!

Four separate gorges figure on the map. The two middle ones, formed by the Beressa and Dalecha rivers, which enclose between them the cliff-encircled plateau of Choli, can be seen to join within 4 to 5 miles of Debra Berhan. It might be supposed that the other two gorges were destined to join the same system within a short distance, but this does not happen. If the small-scale Italian map is to be trusted, the Gunagunit (north-east corner of the sheet) joins the Beressa system some 20 miles away, and the Chacha (of which the north-western gorge is a tributary) nearly 30 miles away. These junctions are approximately north of Debra Berhan; afterwards the river bends away north-westwards to join a main tributary of the Blue Nile. As might be expected, these independent systems running approximately parallel to each other proved most confusing. Between the adjacent systems one sees long, narrow strips of residual plateau, perfectly flat-topped, sometimes so narrow as to stand up like a wall between one valley and the next. The Tallak Amba plateau, partly shown in the north-west of the sheet, is an example. On the other side of the sheet a still narrower neck, followed by the Tegulet path, separates the Beressa and Gunagunit systems. Following this route to the north, off the sheet, one finds that for some distance the plateau has been cut right away: one descends about 600 feet to a point where the shelves in two adjacent valleys practically coalesce, being separated only by a rocky barrier a few feet high. Then one climbs again to a narrow slip of plateau on whose summit, flat as a table-top, stands an important church (Zendegur Ghiorghis). Still farther north this narrows down to a sinuous rampart between the valleys, and eventually broadens once more to form a substantial isolated plateau, which appeared in the distance to be almost inaccessible. Another remarkable feature, jutting out between the Dalecha and the small tributary which next joins the Beressa, is shown near the northern border of the sheet and will be described later.

175 This region is the heart of the old Shoa kingdom and many places included

These figures show that the gorges, together with the adjoining and intervening plateau, carry a considerably higher population than the rest of the plateau, the combined average being over 200 per square mile. The figures for population per church are also interesting. The gorges and the adjacent parts of the plateau contain no fewer than thirteen churches and they serve an average population of only some 650 souls each. On the other hand the churches of the general plateau, not counting those of Debra Berhan, which chiefly serve the townspeople, number only four. They must cater for about three times as many people each, and until recently many more for two of them are recent foundations. 162
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The higher population of the gorge region is attributable to two causes: the greater productivity of the land there, and the historical fact, already referred to, that the Amharas were long forced to live in the gorges, and have re-emerged only in recent times. This is confirmed by the evidence of the churches which, in such numbers, are sure evidence of a long-established Christian population. The oldest ones are among those in the depths of the gorges; sites on the edges of gorges seem to be more recent. The few plateau churches are all relatively modern and bespeak the re-occupation by Amharas; two of them were indeed founded within the last fifteen years, and one as recently as 1945. 174
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As can be seen from the map, sites chosen for dwellings are usually on the higher ground. The favourite sites, of which many examples can be seen on the sheet, are rocky ridges and the tops or upper slopes of hills and minor plateaus. A high place with an outlook, together with reasonable proximity to permanent water, seem to be the conditions sought after. Even the most elevated and exposed hill-tops are generally inhabited, whereas nobody tries to live on the plains near the main streams, which become very swampy in the rains. The ordinary family, together with its domestic animals, lives in a small, irregular cluster of round huts, which in this area are built of stone cemented with mud and carry a conical thatched roof. They are surrounded, as a rule, by a dry-stone wall, which may be shared by several households. Richer people may have an ornamental gatehouse at the main entry, with a little watchman's room over the gate; but such ostentation was not common. 361
[342]
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Disregarding some of the Debra Berhan people, almost the entire population is engaged in farming which, here as elsewhere in Ethiopia, is the mainstay of existence. Some possess their own land; others hold their plots, in return for a proportion of the produce (but without any security of tenure), from absentee landowners. There is also a landless element, greatly increased through the disturbing influence of the Italian occupation, who hire themselves out as ploughmen and labourers. I had intended to measure some typical holdings in order to estimate the area actually required to support a family, but my time in the area was cut short and I never did so. As a very rough estimate I think that about 15-20 per cent. of the area is under cultivation in any one year, which would indicate an average per family of something like 4 acres. This does not include fallow land which, once re-grown with grass, cannot be distinguished at a glance from permanent pasture. 241
423

The most exposed parts of the plateau near Debra Berhan will grow two crops only, barley and broad beans, but a limited amount of wheat (a bearded 241

whom many hard things have been said by prejudiced travellers, play so essential a part in almost every aspect of rural life that the community simply cannot be imagined without them. Christenings, funerals and periodic commemorations of the dead are ceremonies of enormous importance which must, of course, be conducted by priests, and their presence is deemed desirable at the higher forms of civil marriage. The *mahabar* or Private Communion, an old social institution deeply rooted among these people, cannot be held unless priests are present, nor can oaths be sworn, or public inquiries made, without them. The traditional customs of the Ethiopian Church, based on those of the Copts but strongly influenced by Judaistic practices, still retain their hold, some would say a strangle-hold, over the rural population. Many long fasts are rigorously observed, besides weekly ones on Wednesdays and Fridays; so are a multiplicity of feast-days when no work may be done, though Saturday is not always observed, as it used to be, as a workless day equivalent to Sunday.

I have already spoken of the large number of churches scattered over this area, especially in the northern half of the sheet, among the gorges. When first wandering about the district I had no idea they were so numerous. But while making the survey I continually came across new ones, and the last two, those nearest the north-east and north-west corners of the sheet, were discovered only while filling in the final detail. They brought the total for this small area up to twenty. They are not elaborate buildings, nor do they conform to the ordinary western conception of a church. They are indeed round huts, quite uninfluenced by the rectangular form (deriving from a very ancient tradition) which exists in the northern part of the country.¹ Some are built in masonry, some in mud-and-stick, and the slightly more pretentious have an outer colonnade of wooden uprights supporting the edge of the roof. Inside one finds two concentric passages surrounding the *makdas*, or Holy of Holies, which only priests may enter. In the distance one can usually recognize a country church by its fine conical thatched roof, which is much bigger than that of any ordinary hut, and is crowned by a sort of double cone carrying a complicated cross, often ornamented with ostrich eggs.

Of the twenty churches, seven were dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Mariam), four to St. George (Ghiorghis), and three to the Archangel Michael, and these are, in general, the most popular dedications. The principal church in Debra Berhan was a Selassie (Trinity), that of Angolala a Kidane Meheret (Covenant of Mercy). There was one St. John, one St. Gabriel, and one each dedicated to the most famous of Ethiopian saints—"Abo" and Tekla Haymanot. Splendid sites have been chosen for most of these churches, the chief consideration having been, it would seem, visibility from afar. The plateau churches are invariably raised on a conspicuous ridge or hill-top. Many are beautifully situated on the shelves in the gorges, or overlooking these. Some again are placed on the extreme edge of a gorge—such are Saria Mikael in the north-east of the sheet and the old St. George, just north of Debra Berhan, now unfortunately moved nearer the town (both sites are marked on the map).

Perhaps the most striking of all these sites is that of Itege Mariam, to the

¹D. R. Buxton, "The Christian Antiquities of Northern Ethiopia," *Archaeologia*, 92 (1947) 1-42.



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Church at Abo, Baressa gorge



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Monk and deacon receiving offerings (Facing p. 170)

346 north-west of Zanjira near the upper margin of the sheet. The church clings to the side of a steep little hill which stands almost isolated among vast gorges and commands the grandest panorama imaginable of this tormented country. The hill is joined to Zanjira by a narrow causeway little lower than the general plateau, flat on top and dropping away in cliffs on either side, so regular that it almost seems artificial. Harris records a saying which evidently refers to this place: "from Itege you can see the Echegehe" (*i.e.* the chief of the monks, who then lived in Gondar). To be sure, one does seem to overlook a great part of the world from this point of vantage.

[487] Every church is the centre of a radiating system of small paths (not shown on the map) chiefly used by people coming to service. There are of course 796 regular Sunday services, but these are not very well attended. More important are the special festivals observed on certain dates of the Ethiopian month, which may fall on any day of the week. In this area the monthly festivals universally observed, on which no work could be done, were those of St. Michael, St. Mary, and St. George, on the 12th, 21st, and 23rd respectively, as well as "Bal Wold," a commemoration of the Birth of Christ, on the 29th of each month. Of still greater significance in the life of the people are the annual festivals, falling on the same day of the month as the monthly ones but in certain months only. On these annual festivals nearly the whole population makes its way to the churches dedicated to the particular saint commemorated. Often they will visit the local *tebel* or Holy Water and bathe there early in the morning before service. Going on to the church, all remain outside, for there would be no room for such a crowd within the cramped passages of the church itself. In the middle of the morning the *tabot* or ark is brought out and ceremonial dances held before it. Finally, before the service ends, it will be carried three times round the church in procession, attended by magnificent crosses and gaudy umbrellas. These are occasions of great popular excitement and rejoicing, and the congregations are often enormous. The long service over, they break up into gossiping groups, and go back to social lunches in each other's huts.

771 Enough has been said to show how large a part is played among these people by the Church and its priesthood. The country has indeed been described as priest-ridden, the people as over-dominated or even enslaved by the Church. If so, this servitude, at least in the country, is still a willing and unquestioned one. It is also true to say that without the Church the social structure of this countryside would fall to pieces, and life would lose not only its coherence but nearly all its variety and colour.

346 It was mentioned above that, to meet the needs of an increasing plateau 794 population, several new churches had been founded in recent times in the 518 area covered by the map. Two of these were established by "division" of a church which already existed in the gorge. Each original church had two *tabots* one of which was removed for the new foundation, for no church can exist without a *tabot* or altar-slab, this being the only part of the church which is consecrated. Thus the Mariam of the Tallak Amba plateau was derived from the Mariam half-way down the cliff about a mile to the north-east; and similarly a new Ghiorghis of the plateau, just east of Daloti, from the Ghiorghis in the gorge below. Of these "divisions," both of which took place

shortly before the Italian invasion of 1935, the first was accomplished peacefully; but not the second. According to the story told me, the *tabot* of the lower Ghiorghis had been borrowed and carried in solemn procession on the plateau in order to ward off a swarm of locusts which were damaging the crops there. This measure was successful, and the plateau people determined to keep the *tabot* which had proved itself so powerful. The people of the gorge would not agree, and tried to recapture their *tabot*. The plateau party however successfully defended it by force of arms, and later built a little church to house it. It was not unusual to attribute specific powers to *tabots*: for instance, that of Dimbaro Mariam (a little east of the north-east corner of the sheet) used to be carried to war by the emperors, attended by a retinue of priests and scribes, to bring success in battle. [778]

The last church to be founded in these parts was the new St. Gabriel, on a prominent hill-top in the district of Dilila near the south-east corner of the sheet. I came upon it when first following the upper course of the Beressa in December 1946. As I approached the foot of the hill I learnt from passers-by that a new church had been built upon it, and that the foundress herself, a certain great lady from Addis Ababa, was at that moment on the hill. Climbing a rocky track to the top, I saw a cluster of new huts and the still unfinished building of the church. Nearby was a large canvas awning stretched rather clumsily between rough stone walls. Under the awning I found the lady herself, short and stout and genial, sitting on a camp chair; around her, squatting on the ground, was a deferential assembly of local dignitaries, personal retainers and priests. After the fluster caused by my unexpected arrival had died down, I had a talk with the worthy lady who, having just presided at a mid-day meal, now plied me with very welcome refreshment. She had been born and bred in this very place. Having spent most of her life elsewhere, and somehow acquired a certain amount of wealth, she had returned in later life to her place of birth and founded this church only the year before my visit. It met a need, she said, for the area lacked a church, and no other St. Gabriel existed anywhere in the neighbourhood. As it chanced, I had come on the day after St. Gabriel's annual festival (which is the 19th of Tahisas, or, in European style, the 28th of December). She expressed great regret that I had not been present at the festival itself, when big crowds had come from Debra Berhan and from all the surrounding country. [349]

This incident seemed to me interesting as demonstrating the tenacity of the local religious tradition in Ethiopia. After all the upheaval and disruption of Italian occupation and the Second World War, the hold of the ancient Church over the Amhara people seemed unweakened. The Church was able to extend its influence in an area not yet well served as readily as ever. It was still an appropriate act for a pious person to found a new church in a lonely place. Perhaps these things are not surprising, for the Church has been the main support and inspiration of Ethiopian unity since the earliest Christian times. It has always been the focal centre of the national sentiment, the fount of renewed resistance to aggression, the main force, in fact, which has maintained Ethiopia's independence and made of it, as Menelik himself once said, an island of Christianity in the great Islamic sea. [796]

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Published by the Royal Geographical Society

[End map II-A]

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(End map II-B)

SHOAN PLATEAU
Buxton

[pp. 1-20 have not been processed for the files.-Analyst]

CAP. XI.—*Of the fashion and situation of the monasteries and their customs, first this of St. Michael.*

346 The manner of these monasteries as to their sites and
 361 customs: all are situated on the greatest and highest cliffs,
 or the deepest they can find. This one of St. Michael is
 situated on a very steep rock at the foot of another very
 high rock, where no one can ascend. The stone of which
 these rocks consist is of the grain of the walls of the port
 of Portugal.¹ They are very great rocks. The land around
 137 these rocks is all covered with very great forests, and
 besides wild olive trees and high grass between them, in
 which there is much basil. The trees which are not wild
 olive trees are not trees known to us; all are without fruit.
 In the narrow valleys which belong to this monastery there
 are orange trees, lemon trees, citron trees, pear trees and
 fig trees of all kinds, both of Portugal and India; peach
 trees, cabbages, coriander, cardamine, wormwood,² myrtle and
 other sweet-smelling and medicinal herbs, all ill profited by
 1461 because they are not good working men: and the earth
 produces these like wild plants, and it would produce
 whatever was planted and sown in it. The monastery house
 346 looks quite like a church building, constructed like ours.
 It has around it a circuit like a cloister, covered above in
 the same manner as the body of the monastery. It has
 three entrances, as ours are, one principal one, and two side
 ones. The roof of the church and of its cloisters is of wild
 straw, which lasts a man's life: the body of the church is
 built with naives very well constructed, and their arches are

- 346 very well closed; all appears to be vaulted. The church has a chancel and a transept, in the centre transept are curtains from end to end; and there are other curtains before the side doors, from wall to wall. They are curtains of silk: the entrance through these curtains is in three places, they are open in the middle, and they reach one to another, also they can be entered close to the walls. In the said three entrances there are little bells suspended to the curtains themselves, and nobody can enter by any part without these bells ringing. Here there is not more than one altar, which is in the chancel: this has a stand on four props, and the altar reaches to these four props. This stand is covered over above as though with a vault, and there is an altar stone which they call *tabuto*. Upon this altar stone there is a basin of copper, very large and flat below, and with low sides. This basin also reaches to the supports of the stand, which are disposed in a square. Within this large basin there is another smaller one. This stand has curtains hanging down from it to the ground, that is, at the back and sides, which screen the altar, except that in front it is open. One can go all round the altar. The bells are of stone, and in this manner: long thin stones, suspended by cords passed through them, and they strike them with sticks made for the purpose, and they make a sound as of cracked bells heard at a distance. Also at festivals they take the basins from the altar and strike them with sticks, and they help to make a sound. They have also other iron bells, not round, but with two sides, they have a clapper which strikes first on one side and then on the other, and it makes a noise as of helving a mattock. They also have other small ill-made bells, which they carry in their hands at processions, and they ring the whole of them at the festivals. On other days the bells of stones and iron are used. In all churches and monasteries they ring for matins two hours before dawn. They say the prayers by heart and
- 534
- 187
- 796

CAP. XII.—*Where and how the bread of the Sacrament is made, and of a Procession they made, and of the pomp with which the mass is said, and of entering into the church.*

782 The making of this sacramental bread is in this manner.

252 The building in which it is made, in all churches and

[346] monasteries, is, as I said above, on the gospel side, outside of the church and its circuit, which is like a cloister, in the space contained by the other outer circuit, which is not covered in, which space serves for a churchyard. All the churches and monasteries have such a building, and it does not contain anything else except what is requisite for this purpose; that is to say, a mortar for pounding wheat, a machine for making very clean flour, and such as is required for such a purpose, for they do not prepare this sacrament from flour or wheat on which women have laid their hands. They have pots for preparing the paste, which they make thicker than ours. They have a furnace, as for distilling water, and upon it a plate of iron, and in some churches of copper, and in other poor churches of clay. This plate is round and of a good size; they place fire underneath it, and when it is hot clean it with a waxed cloth, pour on it a portion of paste, and spread it out with a wooden spoon of such size as they intend to make the bread, and they make it very round. When it is set they take it off and place it on end, then they make another in the same way. When this second one is set, they take the first and place it upon it, that is to say, the side of the first which was uppermost they put upon the top of the other, fresh with fresh, and so the bread remains one whole one, and they do nothing more than make it round and turn it from one side to the other, and move it about on the plate, that it may bake on both sides and on the circumference. In this manner

[273] they make one or as many as they wish. In this same house are the raisins from which the wine is made, and a machine for pressing.

we had no one to explain it to us : as soon as their liberty not
 to fast had ended, their mass could not be said, except at
 night, and so they did not consent to our saying it ; thus we
 felt aggrieved without cause. This time having ended and
 Trinity passed by, all priests and friars are obliged to fast
 every day except Saturdays and Sundays. They keep this
 fast up to Christmas Day, and as all fast they say mass at
 night. They allege for this the supper of Christ, when He
 consecrated His true Body, having been a fast time, and
 almost night. The general people, that is secular men and
 women, are obliged to fast from Trinity to Advent, Wednes-
 days and Fridays of each week, and from Christmas day to
 the Purification of Our Lady, which they call the feast of
 Simeon,¹ they have no fast. The first three days after the
 Purification, not being Saturday or Sunday, are great fast
 days for priests, friars, and laymen. They say that in these
 three days they do not eat more than once : it is called the
 penitence of Niniveh.² At the end of these three days, up
 to the beginning of Lent, they again fast as from after
 Trinity. During Advent and the whole of Lent, priests,
 friars, lay friars, men and women, small and great, sound
 and sick, all fast. Thus from Easter to Trinity, and from
 Christmas to the Purification, they say mass in the morning,
 because there is no fast, and all the other time at night,
 because they are fasting. Where we buried Mattheus is a
 great and honourable monastery, which is named Bisam,
 and its patron, Jesus. From the monastery where we
 stayed to this is a league of very precipitous country. It is
 on a very high rock, and looking round all sides of it there
 appear like the depths of hell. The monastery house is
 very large in bulk, and larger in revenues, and this
 monastery is very well fitted. The fashion of this house
 is of three large and beautiful naves, with their arches and
 vaulted roofs. They appear to be of wood, and because all

¹ Synanon.

346 is painted, it is not certain whether it is stone or wood. It
 has two sets of cloisters round the body of the church, both
 346 covered in, and much painted with figures of apostles,
 532 patriarchs, prophets, and many things of the Old Law, and
 353 many angels, and St. George on horseback, who is in all the
 churches. This monastery also possesses a great cloth, like
 a piece of tapestry, on which is the crucifix and effigy of
 Our Lady and the apostles, and other figures of patriarchs
 and prophets, and each one has his Latin name written, so
 that no man of the country made it. It has many small
 and ancient pictures, not well made, and they are not upon
 the altars, for it is not their custom: they keep them in a
 [212] sacristy, mixed up with many books, and they bring them
 out on feast days. There is in this monastery a very large
 kitchen and bakehouse, also a very large refectory, in which
 792 they eat. They mostly eat three and three¹ in a large dish,
 262 it is not deep, but flat like a tray, and their food is very
 [264] poor. The bread is of maize and barley, and other grain
 which they call *taffo*,² a small black grain. They make this
 bread round, and of the size and roundness of a citron,³ and
 they give three of these to each friar: to the novices they
 give three loaves to two of them; it is a matter of amaze-
 ment how they can maintain themselves. They also give
 them a few vegetables, without salt or oil. Of this food
 they send to a great many old pensioners, who do not come
 to the refectory. Besides seeing these things when we
 792 buried Mattheus, I saw them many times, because I came
 there to pass time with the friars, principally on feast days,
 when we were near there. In this way I learned about them
 and their property, and revenues and customs. In my
 opinion there were generally always a hundred friars in this

¹ By threes.

² Mansfield Parkins calls it *teff*, the species of corn most esteemed in this country.

³ Zambica, not referred to in Selves' translation.

MONASTERY OF BISAN.

33

monastery, most of them old men of great age, and as dry ⁷⁹²
 as wood; very few young men. This monastery is entirely
 surrounded by a wall, and this wall is closed with two ^[346]
 gates, which are always locked.

CAP. XIV.—*How the monastery of Bisan is the head of six
 monasteries, of the number of the brothers, and ornaments,
 of the "castar" which they do to Philip, whom they call
 a Saint.*

This monastery is the head of six monasteries, which are ⁷⁹²
 around it in these mountains; the furthest off is at a ¹⁹³
 distance of three leagues from it, and all are subject to it,
 and are governed and ruled by it. In each of them is a
 David, that is a guardian appointed by the Abbot or pro-
 vincial of this monastery, who is also David under the
 Abba. I always heard say that there were in this monastery
 three thousand friars, and because I doubted it much I ⁷⁹²
 came here to keep the feast of our Lady of August, in
 order to see if they would come together. Certainly I
 rejoiced to see the riches of this monastery, and the pro-
 cession which they made: in my judgment the friars did
 not exceed three hundred, and most of them were very old.
 There is a circuit to this monastery which surrounds the two ^[346]
 which are like cloisters covered in, and this one which is not
 covered in was on that occasion all covered in with brocades
 and inferior brocades, and velvets of Mekkah, all long
 pieces, sewn one to another in order that they might
 shelter the whole circuit. They made a very beautiful
 procession through this canopied circuit; all wore cloaks of ^[292]
 the same stuffs, brocades, and velvets of Mekkah, badly
 made as I mentioned above. They carried fifty small
 crosses of silver, of bad workmanship, and as many

¹ Should be *teskar*.

and men who sleep there to watch, from fear of the animals 23/
 that roam about the villages all night: and if they did not
 keep this watch nothing alive would remain which they
 would not devour. The people who go to sow millet in the 24/
 mountains of Bisan belong to this country and the neigh- 22/
 bouring towns. The reason why they go and do it is this. 132
 Here there are very numerous grain crops of every kind
 and nature that can be mentioned, as I have already said;
 and because it is near to the sea, by which go all the
 provisions for Arabia, Mekkah, Zebid, Jiddah, and Toro,¹
 and other parts; and they carry the provisions to the sea to
 sell them. And because in this country the winters are
 divided into seasons, and the seed crops do not grow
 except with the rains, they go to sow these millet
 fields at the mountain of Bisan, where it is winter in the
 months of February, March, and April. There is this same
 winter in a mountain called Lama, in this kingdom of the
 Barnagais, which is fully eight days' journey from the
 mountain of Bisan. In another country, which is named
 Doba, and which is quite a month's journey from this lord-
 ship of Lama, there is winter in these same months. As
 for these millet fields, they require rains, and as these win-
 ters happen out of season, they go and sow them where it
 rains, and so profit by both winters. In this town of 346
 Barua are two churches with many priests, one close to the 562
 other, one is for men, the other for women. The men's
 church is called St. Michael, that of the women is named
 after the apostles Peter and Paul. They say that a great [644]
 lord, who was then Barnagais, built the men's church, and
 gave it the privilege that no woman should enter it, except
 only the wife of the Barnagais, with one damsel, whenever
 she went to take the communion, and even she does not
 now enter the church, but takes the communion at the
 door in the inner circuit with the laity, and so the

¹ Mount Sinai.

346 other women do in the church of the apostles, who take it
 562 in its place. I always saw the women of the Barnagais go
 [644] to the women's church to take the communion with the
 other women, and I did not see them use the privilege
 which they say they have, of taking the communion, with
 one damsel, in the church of the men. The circuits of the
 churchyards join to one another; they are of very high
 796 walls. They make the sacramental bread for both churches
 in one building, and they say the masses in both churches
 at the same time, and the priests who serve in one church
 serve also in the other; that is two thirds of the priests
 in the men's church, and one third in the women's church,
 and so they are distributed. These churches have not got
 tithes, but they have got much land belonging to the priests,
 and they put it out to profit and divide the revenues of the
 lands among themselves: the Barnagais gives what is
 necessary to the churches, such as ornaments, wax, butter,
 incense in sufficient quantity, and he supplies them with
 [792] everything. There may be in these churches twenty priests
 and always twenty-two friars. I never saw a church of
 priests which had not got friars, nor a monastery of friars
 which had got priests; because the friars are so nu-
 merous that they cover the world, both in the monasteries
 as also in the churches, roads, and markets: they are in
 every place.

CAP. XXVI.—*How the priests are, and how they are ordained,
 and of the reverence which they pay to the churches and
 their churchyards:*

793
 684 The priests are married to one wife, and they observe the
 587 law of matrimony better than the laity: they live in their
 houses with their wives and children. If their wife should
 die they do not marry again; neither can the wife, but she

CHURCH AT BARRA.

61

an ouquia. This Barnagais forbade the people in his country having any other weights except his own, and they had to ask the Barnagais or his factors for the weights whenever they had to sell or receive gold, so that he had knowledge of what was in the country, and he takes it when he pleases, according to what his country people say, who must know it well. 436

CAP. XXIX.—*Of the church of the town of Barra, and its ornaments, and of the fair there, and of the merchandise, and costumes of the friars, nuns, and priests.*

In this town of Barra there is a church of Our Lady, large, new, very well painted and well built, and handsomely ornamented with many brocades, crimson silks, and Mekkah velvets, and red camlets. The church in this town is served like that at Barua, only that the offices are more solemnized because the Barnagais resides here, and because here there are more clergy and an infinite number of friars. The church is managed by priests. I saw them make a procession round the church in the greater circuit, which is of the churchyard. In it there were many priests, friars, and men and women, because in this church the women receive the communion in the place where the laity do so. In that procession I saw the ornaments which I have mentioned: they must have taken quite thirty turns round the church chaunting like a litany, and sounding many drums and cymbals, as they sound them when they make a procession before the effigy of Our Lady on Sundays and feast days; and they sing and celebrate a feast; and likewise when they give the communion on feast days. They said that this procession was made in supplication to God for rain for their sowing. The bells are of stone, like those of other churches, and the bells badly made. In this town there is a great fair like that of Barua, and so likewise in all the 346 796 443

404 ANSWERS TO ARCHBISHOP OF BRAGA'S QUESTIONS.

136 is no fish there except very little from the rivers; from the sea none. ^{There}

795 There are no monasteries except of St. Anthony, and
792 not of any other order, as some friars say who come from there.

291 The gentlemen, monks, canons, and priests are clothed; most of the other people are bare from the waist upwards, and a sheepskin on the shoulders, with the front and hind feet tied together.

792 Most of the monasteries are situated on high mountains,
346 or in great ravines; they have large revenues and jurisdiction. In many monasteries they do not eat meat all the year, and fish very few times, as they have not go it in the country. The services of these monasteries are psalms and prose, and so it is done in the churches of the canons.

796 Every church has two curtains, one on this side of the altar with little bells, and no one but priests enter inside this curtain; and another curtain in the middle of the church. And no one but persons in orders enter the church, and many gentlemen and honourable persons are ordained in order to enter the church. They go to the door of all the churches and monasteries to read the epistles and gospels, and they say them rapidly, and there they give the communion to the people.

The priests consecrate at the altar, and do not show the sacrament. When the priest who says mass comes to take the communion, he takes a particle from the top, and the other two large parts he leaves for the communion of the people. All the people who come to the church have to receive the communion every day, or else not come to church. When the communion is ended, they give them a little blessed water with which they wash their mouths.

Nobody sits down in the church, nor do they enter it shod; they do not hem or spit, nor do they let any dog or other animal come into the church. They confess standing,

which we call of Guinea, there they are called zegra, quails, 136 pigeons, turtles, hawks, falcons, kites, eagles, thrushes, sparrows, swallows, nightingales, larks, wild ducks, of different kinds,¹ and other waterfowl, herons, cranes, *hemas*, and all other birds that may be in the world, and not known to us; and there are all in this country except magpies and cuckoos, which I never saw, nor heard of their being there.

There are so many apes, that in the kingdom of the Barnagais, in a town which is named Ceroel, at the time the harvest is ripe, they pursue them till they make them pass a mountain; and they keep guard over them in a pass by day, because at night they do not move about, and they give a certain provision to two men who keep guard over them until the corn is gathered in, when they let them loose, or leave off keeping watch over them.

There is much basil in the thickets, and there are none 137 of our trees except cypresses, plumbtrees, and willows by the rivers; there are no melons, cucumbers, nor horse-radish.

In the country there is no gold or silver money, and pur- 436 chases are made by exchange of one thing for another, principally salt, which is current throughout the country as money.

There is linen there, but it gives no fibre, and no stuff is 248 made with it; there is much cotton, and stuff made of it; there is much coloured cloth, and there is a very cold country where they wear serge.

The churches there are well built, but the walls are not 346 well wrought, and they do not place anything upon them; they pitch [the roof] upon props, which reach from the ground upwards.

In the country there is gold, silver, copper and tin, but 135 they do not know how to get it out of the mines.

154 There are many lepers in this country, and they do not live separated from the people, they live all together; there are many people who, out of their devotion, wash them, and tend their sores with their hands.

231 There is a great quantity of honey in all the country, and the bees are not in hives, but inside the houses, where the cultivators live, clinging to the walls on the inside, where they have a mode of egress outside, and also inside they surround the house: but they do not on this account desist from dwelling in the house, because the bees go outside. There are a great number of these swarms of bees, chiefly in the monasteries, there are also many in the woods and mountains, and the men put hives near the trees and fill them with bees, and bring them in them to the houses.

● 346 Since no one sits in the churches, at their doors outside of them, and within the circuit, there are always a great quantity of staves with cross pieces like a ¹ or cripple's crutch, and each one takes his staff and leans upon it as long as he is at the offices of the church. In the churches there are many effigies painted on the walls. Effigies of [532] our Lord and our Lady, and of the apostles and patriarchs, and prophets and angels, and in all the churches St. George. They have not got solid images. There are many books in [212] the churches all written on parchment, because there is no [191] paper there, and the writing and language is Tigray,² which is that of the first country in which Christianity began.

In this country they are not accustomed to write to one another, neither do the officers of justice write anything. All the justice that is done, and what is ordered, is by messengers and speech. I say only that I saw the property of Prester John written down on being delivered up and received.

554 There would be much fruit and much more tillage in the country, if the great men did not ill treat the people, for

¹ Taba.

² Tigra.

TRAVELS

TO DISCOVER

THE SOURCE OF THE NILE.

BOOK V.—CONTINUED.

CHAP. XII.

State of Religion—Circumcision, Excision, &c.

346 **T**HERE is no country in the world in which there are so many churches as in Abyssinia. Though the country is very mountainous, and consequently the view much obstructed, it is very seldom you see less than five or six churches; and, if you are on a commanding ground, five times that number. Every great man, that dies, thinks he has atoned for all his wickedness if he leaves a fund to build a church, or has built one in his lifetime. The king builds many. Wherever a victory is gained, there a church* is erected in the very field, stinking with the putrid bodies of the slain. Formerly this was only the case when the ene-

* The oldest churches in Habbesh are those in the province of Tigre. Axum, now in ruins, possessed many before the Adelian war. A list of these is given in the Appendix of Kebir Neguste, or Chronicle of Axum; and of the lands which they possessed, as given by several kings. E.

346 my was Pagan or Infidel; now the same is observed
[727] when the victories are over Christians.

346 The situation of a church is always chosen near
351 running water, for the convenience of their purifica-
[783] tions and ablutions, in which they observe strictly the
Levitical law. They are always placed upon the top
of some beautiful, round hill, which is surrounded en-
tirely with rows of the oxycedrus, or Virginia cedar,
which grows here in great beauty and perfection, and
is called Arz *. There is nothing adds so much to
the beauty of the country as these churches, and the
plantations about them.

In the middle of this plantation of cedars is inter-
spersed, at proper distances, a number of those beau-
tiful trees called Cusso, which grow very high, and
are all extremely picturesque.

346 All the churches are round, with thatched roofs;
their summits are perfect cones; the outside is sur-
rounded by a number of wooden pillars, which are
nothing else than the trunks of the cedar-tree, and
are placed to support the edifice, about eight feet of
the roof projecting beyond the wall of the church,
which forms an agreeable walk, or colonade, around
it in hot weather, or in rain. The inside of the church
is in several divisions, according as is prescribed by
the law of Moses. The first is a circle somewhat wi-
der than the inner one; here the congregation sit and
pray. Within this is a square, and that square is di-
vided by a veil or curtain, in which is another very

* Ludolf, in his dictionary, says, this word, in Hebrew, signi-
fies any tall tree. In this, however, he is mistaken. The trans-
lators did not, indeed, know what tree it was, and so have said
this to cover their ignorance; but Arz is as exclusively the oxy-
cedrus, as is an oak or an elm when so named. Arz is indeed a
tall tree, but every tall tree is not Arz, which is the Virginia
berry-bearing cedar.

THE SOURCE OF THE NILE.

3

small division answering to the holy of holies. This ³⁴⁶ is so narrow, that none but the priests can go into it. You are bare-footed whenever you enter the church; and, if bare-footed, you may go through every part of it, if you have any such curiosity, provided you are pure, i. e. have not been concerned with women for 24 hours before, or touched carrion, or dead bodies (a curious assemblage of ideas); for in that case you are not to go within the precincts, or outer circumference of the church, but stand and say your prayers at an awful distance among the cedars.

All persons of both sexes, under Jewish disqualifications, are obliged to observe this distance; and this is always a place belonging to the church, where, unless in Lent, you see the greatest part of the congregation; but this is left to your own conscience; and, if there was either great inconvenience in the one situation, or great satisfaction in the other, the cause would be otherwise.

When you go to the church, you put off your shoes ⁷⁸² before your first entering the outer precinct; but you must leave a servant there with them, or else they will be stolen, if good for any thing, by the priests and monks before you come out of the church. At entry you kiss the threshold, and two door-posts, go in and say what prayer you please; that finished, you come out again, and your duty is over. The churches ⁵³² are full of pictures, painted on parchment, and nailed ³⁴⁶ upon the walls, in a manner little less slovenly than you see paltry prints in beggarly country ale-houses. There has been always a sort of painting known among the scribes, a daubing much inferior to the worst of our sign-painters. Sometimes, for a particular church, they get a number of pictures of saints, on skins of parchment, ready finished from Cairo, in a style very little superior to these performances of

346 their own. They are placed like a frieze, and hung in
 532 the upper part of the wall. St George is generally
 there with his dragon, and Demetrius fighting a lion.
 There is no choice in their saints; they are both of the
 Old and New Testament, and some that might be dis-
 pensed with from both. There is St Pontius Pilate
 and his wife; there is St Balaam and his ass; Samson
 and his jaw-bone; and so of the rest. But the thing
 that surprised me most was a kind of square-miniature
 upon the front of the head-piece, or mitre, of the
 priest, administering the sacrament at Adowa, repre-
 senting Pharaoh on a white horse, plunging in the Red
 Sea, with many guns and pistols swimming upon the
 surface of it around him.

Nothing embossed, nor in relief, ever appears in
 any of the churches; all this would be reckoned ido-
 latry, so much that they do not wear a cross, as has
 been represented, on the top of the ball of the sen-
 dick, or standard, because it casts a shade; but there
 is no doubt that pictures have been used in their
 churches from the very earliest age of Christianity.

793 The Abuna is looked upon as the patriarch of the
 Abyssinian church, for they have little knowledge of
 the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria. We are perfect-
 ly ignorant of the history of these prelates for many
 years after their appointment. The first of these men-
 tioned is Abuna Tecla Haimanout, who distinguished
 himself by the restoration of the royal family, and the
 regulations he made both in the church and state, as we
 have seen in the history of those times. A very re-
 markable, but wise regulation was then made, that
 the Abyssinians should not have it in their power to
 choose one of their own countrymen as Abuna.

Wise men saw the fallen state of literature among
 them; and unless opportunity was given, from time
 to time, for their priests to go abroad to Jerusalem for
 their instruction, and for the purpose of bringing the

CHAPTER XVI

THE NATIONAL CHURCH AND
RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA (*continued*)

- 346 771 BRUCE wrote that there was no country in the world where there were so many churches, and I have seen an estimate which I should think was well under the mark—of 3000 for Shoa, 1100 for Gojam, and 2600 for the districts of Gondar and Axum. For even small villages have two or three churches each, and it is a popular axiom that he who has erected a church has atoned for every sin. And to each of this legion of churches are attached many priests who live in remarkably simple—to put it mildly—accommodation in the precincts.

- 346 The buildings themselves are quite unpretentious, being small circular erections built of the stone that abounds everywhere in the country, covered with pointed thatched roofs surmounted by a cross on the points of which ostrich eggs are generally impaled. The Abyssinians show a considerable measure of reverence to their churches, outwardly at all event. I have frequently seen men of importance stop their retinue when passing the church, dismount, and kiss the earth.

- [788] The principal modern church in Abyssinia is that of St. George, the patron saint of Abyssinia, at Addis Ababa. It is a stone-built edifice, octagonal in shape, surmounted by a large central dome; it is of no particular style of architecture, though it approximates to the Greek, and externally it is not very pleasing to

NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA 187

the eye. Its beauty was not increased by the addition of a corrugated iron annexe for the purpose of seating some of the foreign guests at the Emperor's coronation. 346 ●

The Abouna was good enough to arrange for us to visit the church, and we were received with ceremony by a number of priests, who were exceedingly kind and enabled us to make a thorough inspection, and even allowed us to take some photographs (which unfortunately, owing to the bad light, did not come out). They showed us everything with great enthusiasm and begged us to return "when a great feast was in progress". The building consists of three portions, a sort of outer gallery, an inner court, and finally the Holy Place or Holy of Holies, an inner chamber in the centre of the building in which rests the *Tabot* or representative of the Ark of the Covenant to which only the priests are allowed access. 346 778

The priests threw open the doors of the Holy Place for us to see in; it contained a kind of altar where the Sacraments are kept, and was surrounded by priests in very gorgeous vestments, burning incense and holding big crosses and crucifixes. 778 788

In one of the galleries a service was proceeding. Two priests were beating with their hands very big drums made of wood and hide; many others were shaking their curious little brass cymbals; and all were chanting, swaying their bodies, and slowly waving their praying-sticks. The time was really good, and the chant was rhythmic and tuneful, and not at all unmelodious. 796 534

The galleries were profusely decorated with huge life-size paintings depicting mainly scenes from the Scriptures, scenes from the life of Christ, the miracles, etc.; one dreadfully realistic picture of the Massacre 353 532

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874
516



FIG. 1.—School of qenē (Wāshāā Māryām monastery, Gojjam)

• 346



FIG. 2.—Nagāstā's church, Aḡāntchā, Manz

[P.14-A]

[GONDAR]

25 / *The Legacy of Manz and Gondar*

sponsored the translation of works from Arabic. Among these were *Laws of the Kings*, a collection of civil and canon laws which became the official basis for judication, and a penitential manual, *Spiritual Medicine*, the last major production in Ge'ez literature. 175*
643
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[533]

Yohānnes also continued Fāsīl's work of "purifying" the church. He decreed that descendants of the Portuguese must leave Ethiopia unless they joined the Orthodox Church and that Muslims must reside apart, either in their own villages or in ghettos. Ordained as a priest before becoming emperor, Yohānnes followed keenly the theological disputes of his day. Toward the end of his reign he convoked a synod in Gondar to discuss the nature of the Holy Spirit in Christ, the chief theological question in Ethiopian history. [798]
[793]
[779]

Iyāsu I, like many of Ethiopia's rulers, appears to have been moved by deep religious feeling. Describing Iyāsu's religiosity, one of the priests of Gondar wrote an eulogy a few years after his death: 175*
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The king used to stand at the window of his palace . . . and listen from his tower on high to the singing of the priests and learned men, to their gentle hymns which moistened the bones by their exceeding tenderness. When their offerings pleased him greatly he was pierced with affection for them and drawn by the harmony of their heavenly peace. For this reason . . . he would prepare for them dinners filled with delights, and bid them eat with him in his royal chambers, ornamented all about with the beauty of pure gold and wrought silver. He would take off his gold necklace and present it to them. He adorned them with garments of purple and of staffs interwoven with gold from the treasury of his kingdom. . . . None of the kings before him had done such as he, and none of the clergy of yore had been treated as were his priests and learned men. After the dinners, the king and his priests together sang hymns of joy and jubilation all night long in the palace—in their time of pleasure, in the sweetness of divine ministry.⁶

Iyāsu the Great did much to establish Gondar as the most important center of religious culture in Ethiopia. To this end he brought outstanding priests and learned men from all over the country to his capital. From Gojjam, for example, he brought the great master of religious verse, Kīfflē Yohānnes, whose lines are remembered even today. The number of teachers in Gondar in his time exceeded five hundred; there were one hundred and fifty at his church Dabra Berhān Selassie alone.* It was under Iyāsu I that the classic subject matter of the higher religious studies in Abyssinia—*zēmā* ("religious 175*
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* Dabra Berhān Selassie, one of the two churches built by Iyāsu I, is the only one of the original churches of Gondar which survived later conflagrations of the city. The original paintings which covered its walls have been preserved, as well as the remarkable ceiling from which rows of wide-eyed angels look down from between wooden beams. The church provides separate places for nobility and commoners, and a balcony for the emperor. [346]

[MANZ]

29 / The Legacy of Manz and Gondar

The history and customs of Manz are more obviously related to its geography than is the case with Gondar. The encircling wall of mountains has been a source of isolation and protection, two factors of great moment in the history of the area. Peculiar eating and clothing habits have developed in response to a climate which, owing to the altitude of Manz and its position at the edge of an escarpment that leads down to a desert of the Rift Valley, is one of the coldest in Ethiopia. The temperature often approaches the freezing point, and in the colder months (October and November) standing in the sunshine at high noon is no defense against a shrill wind that pierces the bones. 133 132 (175)* [184]

Barley is the only crop that thrives in the highest parts of Manz, though wheat, beans, peas, and chick-peas grow in the slightly lower altitudes. But *tēff*, the grain preferred by Abyssinians for the preparation of their staple food—a kind of pancake known as *īnjarā*—cannot be cultivated at those heights, so the Manzē typically eats *īnjarā* made of barley. 241 262

Sheep are a major item in the Manz economy. The average farm has a herd of 100 to 150 sheep, which provide a heavy wool as well as the Manzē's favorite meat. This wool is used to make the *bānnā*, a warm blanket which is wrapped around the body and constitutes the standard dress of the Manzē. The *bānnā* distinguishes him from other Abyssinians, who wear a white cotton toga called *shammā*. Wealthier men wear the *barnos*, a tailored cape made of dark wool. Manzē wool is also used for the weaving of rugs which ornament the homes of the well-to-do. 233 236 291 184 [262] 556 286 [352]

No dyes are used in working their wool, so a crowd of Manzēs in natural-colored *bānnā* seen at a distance resembles a flock of their sheep. This is one of the touches contributing to the impressive aesthetic unity of the Manz landscape. The effect is also produced by the fact that the Manzē's house is built of stone, the same stone that is seen everywhere on the terrain; and its conical roof is made of thatch, which makes the roof look like the piles of grain in the fields. The churches are also built of stone with thatched conical roofs. Everything one sees in Manz bespeaks a harmony with the natural environment. 182 291 [386] 342 182 346 182

The cold climate of Manz is invigorating. It prevents food from spoiling quickly and discourages diseases which flourish in lower altitudes. The Manzē boasts that his climate keeps people healthy and gives them long lives, and indeed it is not uncommon to find men sprightly in their eighties and nineties. But only the hardy survive, for life there is as rugged as the land, and the people—like their landscape—are stony, bleak, and full of dark recesses. 132 [165] [181]

Manz does not occupy so conspicuous a place in Ethiopian history as Gondar. Indeed, most books on Ethiopia do not even mention the area. While 175*

74 / WAX & GOLD

*565 pia by a Muslim from the East—suggests a repetition of the Grāñ episode.
 805 Finally, there is the previously mentioned conception of the end of the world
 796 as a time of renewal, when those who died first will return to life and history
 822 will begin again.
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822 Space, like time, is not regarded as an amoral and homogeneous continuum to be submitted to systematic measurement. Land is not something to be
 (423) bought or sold at will, but belongs by right to a family, a church, or a ruling line. Land titles are defined loosely, by convention and approximation, and the Amhara peasantry have objected to attempts by the government to make exact measurements of their land. The reluctance to rationalize space is conspicuous even in the capital of Ethiopia, where to this day there are no street numbers, so that places can only be identified roughly as near a certain police station or past a certain hospital. Directions are indicated with difficulty. The points of the compass are almost never used, though there are words for the four directions. Instead, the vague terms for "up" and "down" serve to answer almost every question about location.

*565 Though the peasants are often unclear about the precise boundaries of various place names in the countryside, they do know just where the several churches are located over a wide area. It is customary for them to locate a
 822 given place by reference to the nearest church. Thus they will say: "He lives
 • 346 below Abbo" or "We must travel above Mikā'el." As a result, locations in
 (823) space are identified by the same set of co-ordinates as are events in time, namely, the names of the saints. Moreover, just as certain months each year
 *565 are occasions for special celebrations in behalf of each sacred figure, so in the
 346 countryside certain churches are considered especially holy shrines. Thus, there
 778 is special veneration for *Terr Māryām* ("St. Mary's Day in the month of
 796 Terr") and *Gishēn Māryām* ("St. Mary's Church in the district of Gishēn").

*565 The dominant configuration in the Amhara's experience of space is that
 822 of concentric circles. Whether or not we try to relate this to the cyclical
 (81) organization of time, the fact remains that the pattern of a charged center surrounded by circles of decreasing significance recurs in the main areas of Amhara life.

*565 It appears, first, in his architecture. The traditional peasant home is round,
 342 with a conical roof supported by a pole that rises in the center of the circle.
 341 This is the domestic inner sanctum, a room for eating and talking and getting warm by the fire. It is often separated by a circular partition from
 181 sections that serve for storage, cooking, and animals. The compound in which
 822 the home stands is surrounded in some regions by a stone or brush fence, a
 (417) surrounding that separates the residential kin group from the whole outside world.
 (351)

*565 This pattern is more fully developed in the churches, which are round like
 181 the huts but larger and contain two concentric circular partitions inside. The
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The

75 / *The World of the Amhara Peasant*

holy ark stands in the center of the church, an area restricted to priests and deacons and consecrated to the performance of the Mass. The second circle is reserved for those few who are privileged to partake of Communion— young children and rare adults who have been married according to the church laws. The third circle is where ordinary people stand during the Mass and where the clergy sing and dance on special holidays. The church itself stands in a compound ringed by an outer wall, representing still another grade of ritual impurity. Those who have eaten before the Mass or have had sexual relations the night before are not supposed to enter the church at all, and must stand outside the outer wall during services.

This spatial pattern is likewise found in the arrangement of people out of doors. The outstanding instance of this is the traditional organization of the military camp of a *negus* or *rās*. In the center of the camp is the large, round tent of the chief, together with tents for the holy ark, high-ranking visitors, and supplies. Around this central area the commanding officers are stationed. They in turn are encircled by the tents of the cavalry. Beyond this ring, finally, is an outer circle composed of the huts of the common soldiery.

Spontaneous arrangements along this line appear during festivals. The person or persons who sing or dance are placed in the center and the spectators form a circle around them. During religious celebrations this circle consists of priests and *dabtarā*. At some distance the laymen watch from an outer circle. Here, as in the home, church, and military camp, concentric circles serve to segregate people according to their place in some hierarchical order.

Society and Human Nature

The Amhara's conceptualization of the human order lends itself as a whole to being articulated in terms of patterns of concentricity and hierarchy. The sociological component of the Amhara peasant world view consists, on the one hand, of a series of notions centered on the individual self and his progressively wider groupings; and, on the other hand, of a series of distinctions which rank persons in accord with criteria of superior and inferior qualities.

The Amhara peasant tends to have a pronounced awareness of his personal ego. The boundaries of his person and property appear firmly marked in his mind and are more important to him than the boundaries of any of his social egos. He likes to live on his own land, at a good distance from neighbors. If he lives in a homestead with other relatives, he prefers to dwell in his own separate building. The Amhara's proverbial comment on the subject is that "Home and the grave are by oneself." He is sensitive about his personal belongings, quick to defend his rights, reluctant to accept suggestions, and inflammable over insults. His conception of the admirable

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000 townspeople of highland Begemder.

632 Field research was concentrated in the vicinity of
114 Gondar, the largest of the province's towns, and imperial
capital during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

[874] Today, it is the provincial capital and an important ec-
• [346] clesiastical center, housing several famous churches and
* [756] renowned ecclesiastical academies. The town is also the
home of many of the province's most famous healers. Ex-
tended research was also conducted in the Woggera region
north of Gondar, in the rural hamlets discussed in Chap-
121 ter Three. The division of research efforts between
town and countryside reflects the important urban and
rural aspects of Amhara medical practices with regard to
the distribution of practitioners.

Through observation and inquiry, this field research
sought, first, to elicit a description of the social and
natural environments in which Amhara perceive pathogenic,
prophylactic, diagnostic, and therapeutic forces to oper-
ate. A second concern was to examine how Amhara select
elements from these environments, and arrange them into
etiologies with which to explain particular disease epi-
sodes. On the one hand, this meant collecting abstract,
conscious etiological models used by Amhara; on the other
hand, it meant recognizing etiologies that are construc-
ted pragmatically and piecemeal, in the course of pro-
phylactic and therapeutic failures and successes. Fi-

- 632 motives of piety and supplication, to the saints' epony-
[796] mic churches. Within the environs of Gondar, for ex-
• [346] ample, there are forty-two churches, and perhaps half
are of sufficient antiquity and fame to mark them for
special visits on the saints' days. Each of the market
towns contains at least one famous church. The larger
towns are, moreover, the seats of their sub-provinces,
and are the objects of visits by peasants on "govern-
[691] ment" (mongist) business. Most frequently, this means
[423] litigation involving the disposition of land rights.

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Two Rural Hamlets. Tikurmidir and Lemmariet are
neighboring hamlets, situated on fertile dega lands. To-
gether they occupy the southwest quadrant of Kidus
Yowhannis parish (hamlet and parish names are pseudo-
nyms), a three hour walk from the awraja seat, Dabat
town, in the Woggera region. Of the two, Tikurmidir is
larger:

	Tikurmidir	Lemmariet
[141] Total population	151	95
[592] Total households	36	24

In both hamlets, a majority of households are headed by

- [613] risteñas. These households are distributed among the
[592] hamlets' ambilineages as follows:

		Tikurmidir	Lemmariet
Ambilineage	I	18	10
Ambilineage	II	6	1